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ABSTRACT

In an investigation of the socioeconomic and demographic correlates of sex role attitudes among black Americans, four sex role attitude items were analyzed. Two tapped attitudes toward familial division of labor, one addressed perceptions of the consequences of women working, and one addressed attitudes toward motherhood. Eight background variables were included in the analysis: age, education, household income, region of residence, religiosity, and marital, job, and parental status. Findings documented a great deal of support for egalitarianism among black Americans, both men and women. Generally, the data showed support for more modern sex role norms in all areas except one--motherhood, which a large majority of both sexes saw as the most fulfilling role for women. Although there were sex differences on the other three norms, they were not as large as might be expected. Overall, the correlates and predictors of sex role attitudes of men and women were found to be different. More relationships were found between socioeconomic variables and sex role attitudes for black women than for black men. Except for sex, none of the background variables, either alone or with others, explained more than a very modest proportion of the variance in sex role attitudes. (CMG)

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Correlates of Sex Role Attitudes Among Black Men and Women: Data from a National Survey of Black Americans

by
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The past decade has witnessed an enormous increase in research on sex roles. As a result, an impressive body of literature is currently available in this rapidly developing area (see Scanzoni and Fox, 1980). It is still clear, however, that there are tremendous gaps in the literature. Especially evident is the relative scarcity of contemporary research on sex role attitudes among minorities in general and Blacks in particular.

Much of the existing research on Black sex role attitudes has been limited to studies of racial differences and particularly whether Blacks are attitudinally more egalitarian or role-flexible than whites. There is a great deal of conflicting data in this area. Some studies found that Blacks had more egalitarian sex role attitudes than whites (Scanzoni, 1976), while others reported more traditional attitudes among Blacks (Binion, 1981; Gump, 1975; Hershey, 1978; Rosen, 1978). A third group of studies suggested that Black sex role attitudes may be more complex than white sex role attitudes. That is, for example, Scanzoni (1975) found that Blacks were more traditional than whites in some sex role domains and less traditional in others. Similarly, Milliham and Smith (1981) concluded that for Blacks, "Beliefs concerning equality between the sexes are not highly interrelated and constitute largely independent cognitive dimensions."

In addition to findings of racial differences, gender and socioeconomic differences have emerged. Although men have been generally found to be more conservative than women, there is some indication that these sex differences are less pronounced among Blacks (Crovits & Steinmann, 1980; Hershey, 1978). The findings for socioeconomic variables have been consistent with that for whites. That is, educated persons, as well as those with high incomes, tend to be more egalitarian and liberal in their sex role attitudes than those with lower incomes and less education.

In general, the available research on Black sex roles is much less developed than on whites. In addition, there have been a number of conceptual limitations. Several scholars have raised questions about the value of trying to understand Black sex role attitudes within a framework of white sex role ideology and have suggested that constructs such as "traditional" and "modern" may not be appropriate for Blacks (Gump, 1978). The contemporary sex role attitudes of Black women and men must be examined within the context of their particular history and experiences as well as the changes in the perception of women's roles in the broader society. The interaction of racial and sexual stratification complicates the unraveling of both dimensions and determinants of Black sex role attitudes.

Historically, the sex roles of Blacks and whites have been different. These differences have had a particular impact upon the nature of Black male-female relationships as well as upon the family. To a great extent, the power of individuals within relationships and families were subjugated to and influenced by forces in the wider society during slavery. Spouses and children could be sold away at the whim of the slave owner. Men were limited in their ability to fulfill the roles of family provider and protector. Although women's spousal and parental rights and roles were also abridged and constrained, the interest of the slave owner in increasing his capital allowed some carrying out of reproductive and nurturant roles.

During the period that followed the end of slavery, social and economic discrimination have continued to constrain and influence Black family life and male-female relationships. The labor force marginality of Black men has limited their fulfillment of the provider role and forced women, who have had access to low level services jobs, to both share this role or shoulder its responsibilities alone. Among Blacks there have long existed the reality and efficacy of interchangeable sex roles in the face of the traditional expectations and values of the wider society.

Although these patterns of sex role behaviors can be seen as indeed functional over time for Black family survival, social science has treated them in the recent past as indicators of pathology. According to Ladner (1972), ". . . the highly functional role that the Black female has historically played has caused her to be erroneously stereotypes as a matriarch, and this label has been quite injurious to Black women and men." (p. 41).

Indeed, egalitarian sex role attitudes, female employment and female responsibilities for households have all been seen as evidence of dominant, castrating Black women and weak, shiftless Black men. Ironically, as similar patterns emerge among whites, different attributions are being made. As women's liberation comes into its own, egalitarian sex roles have become not only legitimate, but valued.

Given the complexities discussed above, it becomes apparent that Black sex roles cannot be fully understood within the sex role ideology of the general population. What is "traditional" or "modern" for Blacks is debatable. Thus, this research evaluates

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Black sex roles in terms of their flexibility and interchangeability, as being "liberal."

In addition to conceptual limitations in research on Black sex roles, there also have been methodological limitations. Most of what is known about Black sex roles emerged from small and often non-representative Black samples. As a result, very little information is available that can confidently be generalized to the entire Black population. In an attempt to remedy the situation somewhat, the present research is an investigation of the socio-economic and demographic correlates of sex role attitudes based on a large national probability sample of Black Americans.

DATA AND METHOD

These data emerge from two sources—a national cross-sectional study of Black adults, aged 18 and older and a reinterview of a sub-sample of this cross-sectional survey conducted by the Program for Research on Black Americans (PRBA) at the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan during 1979 and 1980. Interviews were obtained from 2,107 respondents in a multi-stage probability sample of Black households in the continental United States.[1] Respondents who were determined to be eligible[2] for another PRBA study—a Three Generational Family Study—were later reinterviewed as part of that study.[3] Of the 2107 respondents in the cross-sectional study, 1122 or roughly 52 percent, were eligible for the Three Generational Study. Reinterviews were obtained from 865 of these respondents—567 women and 298 men. Only respondents who were interviewed in both the original cross-sectional study and reinterviewed as part of the Three Generational Study were included in the analyses presented in this paper.

The analyses involved four sex role attitude items. Two items tapping attitudes toward familial division of labor were asked in the original cross-sectional study. Two other items, one addressing the perceptions of consequences of women working and the other attitudes toward the role of motherhood for women, were asked in the reinterview. The items were worded as follows:

1. For the next two statements, please tell me if you *strongly agree, agree, disagree* or *strongly disagree*.
   a. Both men and women should share equally in child care and housework.
   b. Both men and women should have jobs to support the family.
2. For the next few statements, please tell me if you *strongly agree, agree, disagree* or *strongly disagree*.
   a. Having a job takes away from a woman's relationship with her husband or children.
   b. Being a mother and rearing children is the most fulfilling experience a woman can have.

The items above will be referred to as "Share Familial Tasks" (1a), "Share Provider Role" (1b), "Women's Job Hurts Family" (2a) and "Motherhood" (2b) in the remainder of this paper. The items are scored from 1 to 4 with higher scores indicating more liberal responses.

These preliminary analyses examine the support for these sex role attitudes among Blacks in general and among Black men and women, the intercorrelation of these attitudes for the total sample and by sex, and the bivariate relationships of these four sex role attitudes and nine background variables—age, education, household income, region of residence, religiosity, and marital, job and parental status. All of these variables were included as predictors of each attitude item in a Multiple Classification Analysis (MCA).

Results

There was a great deal of support for an egalitarian division of family tasks and responsibilities among the respondents in this study. Approximately 88 percent of the sample expressed agreement (both "strongly agree" and "agree") that men and women should share in child care and household tasks and approximately 75 percent agreed that both men and women should have jobs to support the family. In addition to these egalitarian views of familial roles, the majority of the sample did not feel that having a job takes away from a woman's relationship with her husband and family. However, more than 85 percent agreed that motherhood is the most fulfilling experience a woman can have.

Intercorrelation of items

The items were only modestly intercorrelated. The largest correlation for all respondents was between "Share Familial Tasks" and "Share Provider Role," $r = .30$, $p < .001$. "Woman's Job Hurts Family" and "Motherhood" were very modestly, but significantly, correlated, $r = .14$, $p < .001$). When sex was controlled, the correlation between "Share Familial Tasks" and "Share Provider Role" decreased slightly for men, $r = .23$, $p < .001$, whereas the correlation between "Woman's Job Hurts Family" and "Motherhood" increased, $r = .22$, $p < .001$. The opposite effect occurred for women, with the correlation of two familial role items increasing slightly, $r = .32$, $p < .001$ and the correlation for the other two items decreasing, $r = .11$, $p < .001$. Also, the correlation between "Share Provider Role" and "Woman's Job Hurts Family" increased to a significant, although still modest level, $r = .12$, $p < .001$ for men only. These items remained uncorrelated for women.

Correlates of Sex Role Attitudes

Given the caste-class dimensions of sex stratification still persistent in modern society, one would expect the correlates or determinants of sex role preferences and attitudes to be different for women and men. The remainder of this paper addresses this very general hypothesis. The bivariate relationships between each attitude item and the eight predictor variables as well as the relative importance of each of these predictors in determining each attitude were assessed by separate MCAS for women and men.

Table 1 presents measures of each predictor's ability to explain variance in the sex role attitude items alone (eta) and its explanatory power relative to other predictors (beta) for each attitude item for both men and women. Overall, a difference was found in the correlates of sex role norms of Black men and women. Age was related to attitudes about the division of family tasks and roles only for Black women, eta = .12, $p < .05$. Younger women were more likely to hold liberal attitudes toward role and task sharing than older women. No age relationship was found for either sex for perceptions of the effects of women working. However, age was related to attitudes about motherhood for Black men, eta = .16, $p < .05$. Interestingly, both men 18–34 years old and those over 55 had more conservative attitudes toward moth-

TABLE 1

Explanatory Power of Nine Predictors of Four Sex Role Attitudes for Black Women and Men

Predictors	Men Eta	Men Beta	Women Eta	Women Beta
A. Share Familial Tasks				
Age	.02	.04	.12*	.18
Marital Status	.16	.18	.04	.17
Education	.11	.13	.14	.12
Family Income	.12	.12	.08	.05
Religiosity	.19*	.22	.07	.07
Job Status	.10	.07	.09	.08
Region	.13	.17	.09	.10
Parental Status	.07	.01	.04	.01
R^2	=	.12	R^2 =	.08
R^2 Adj.	=	.04	R^2 Adj. =	.03
B. Share Provider Role				
Age	.09	.10	.21***	.20
Marital Status	.11	.07	.18***	.13
Education	.02	.10	.06	.07
Family Income	.05	.10	.05	.01
Religiosity	.11	.10	.08	.07
Job Status	.01	.05	.06	.07
Region	.12	.14	.04	.02
Parental Status	.08	.04	.08	.00
R^2	=	.06	R^2 =	.08
R^2 Adj.	=	.00 (incalculable)	R^2 Adj. =	.04
C. Woman's Job Hurts Family				
Age	.14	.14	.06	.05
Marital Status	.09	.23	.11	.10
Education	.22	.19	.12	.09
Family Income	.08	.09	.10	.07
Religiosity	.14	.12	.17***	.17
Job Status	.02	.16	.04	.03
Region	.16	.16	.15***	.16
Parental	.10	.18	.11	.10
R^2	=	.17	R^2 =	.09
R^2 Adj.	=	.09	R^2 Adj. =	.05
D. Motherhood				
Age	.16*	.19	.14*	.03
Marital Status	.12	.12	.09	.06
Education	.27***	.26	.24***	.19
Family Income	.11	.05	.14	.05
Religiosity	.16	.08	.10	.06
Job Status	.06	.04	.15	.06
Region	.23	.17	.19***	.15
Parental Status	.16***	.19	.10	.06
Interview Mode			.04	.02
R^2	=	.20	R^2 =	.10
R^2 Adj.	=	.11	R^2 Adj. =	.06

*Bivariate relationship significance of $p < .05$
**Bivariate relationship significance of $p < .01$
***Bivariate relationship significance of $p < .001$

The adjusted R^2 or R^2 adj estimates the proportion of variance explained by all the predictors adjusted for chance of fitting the model for a given sample. The unadjusted R^2 or multiple correlation coefficient estimates the proportion of variance explained by a particular run of MCA (Andrews et al., 1973).

erhood than men 34–54 years old. This relationship is contrary to what one might expect, given the exposure of younger men to new emergent role norms.

Marital status was only related to women's attitudes towards sharing the provider role, eta = .18, $p < .001$. Married women were more conservative than previously married and never married women. Parental status was an important predictor of Black men's attitudes toward motherhood. Men who had children were more likely to agree that "motherhood is the most fulfilling experience a woman can have." Region and religiosity were both included in these analyses as indicators of normative environment. Religiosity was related to attitudes toward the familial division of labor for men only (eta = .19, $p < .05$) and to perceptions of the effect of female employment among women only (eta = .17, $p < .001$). Men who said they were "very or fairly" religious were more likely to hold liberal attitudes about sharing household tasks. Interestingly, women who said they were "fairly religious" were more liberal in their attitudes about the effects of women working upon the family than women who said "very," "not too" or "not religious" at all. Region was significantly correlated with perceptions of the effects of female employment for women only (eta = .15, $p < .001$) and with attitudes toward motherhood for both men, (eta = .23, $p < .001$) and women (eta = .19, $p < .001$). Women in the Northeast had more liberal attitudes toward women working than those in other regions. Both Southern and mid-Western men and Southern women were more conservative in their attitudes about motherhood than women and men in other regions.

Support for the egalitarian division of labor within the family did not differ by socioeconomic level for men. However, education as an indicator of SES was related to attitudes toward the sharing of familial roles and tasks for Black women eta = .14, $p < .01$. Women with at least 16 years of education were more liberal in their attitudes than women with less education. Conversely, education was related to the perception of harmful effects stemming from female employment among men (eta = .22, $p < .001$) but not among women. Men with some education beyond high school but who were not college graduates were the most conservative. Those with more education were the most liberal. Education was related to evaluations of motherhood as the most fulfilling role for women among both men (eta = .27, $p < .001$) and women (eta = .24, $p < .001$). Overall, attitudes increased with years of education.

In summary, these data further document the existence of a great deal of support for egalitarianism among Black Americans—both men and women. Generally, these data show support for more modern sex role norms in all areas except one—motherhood. Motherhood is seen as the most fulfilling role for women for a large majority of both sexes. Although there are sex differences on three of these norms, they are perhaps not as large as one might expect. These findings are consistent with previous research suggesting sex differences in sex role attitudes are less evident for Blacks than whites, that Blacks are more liberal than whites on some sex role attitudes and more conservative on others. Scanzoni (1975) found that Blacks were more conservative on norms pertaining to the appropriate behavior of the sexes but more liberal on those addressing the rights and individualism of women. Also, Black women have been found to have more nurturant attitudes than other women. Motherhood and family responsibilities have not been seen as antithetical to working or

(Continued on p. 11)

to being "liberated" in the modern sense of the word (Gump, 1978). Indeed, these dimensions of sex role attitudes were not correlated for women in this study.

Overall, this investigation found the correlates and predictors of sex role attitudes of Black women and men to be different. More relationships were found between the socioeconomic variables included in these analyses and the sex role attitudes of Black women than for the sex role attitudes of Black men. However, except for sex, none of the background variables in these analyses, either alone or with other predictors, explained more than a very modest proportion of the variance in these sex role attitudes.

Central to most research on sex role norms is the issue of women sharing the role of provider. As has been documented again and again, Black women have always worked outside of the home at a greater rate than other women. Assumption of the provider role came first out of coercion and later out of need. It is in this context of history and experiences of Black women and men that the sex role models in the general literature are not applicable to Blacks, and thus the dimensions of "traditional vs. modern" become blurred. Sex role norms and behavior for Blacks are confounded by the unique experience of being Black in America and by the influence of the larger white society. Sub-group analyses were pursued in an effort to gain insights into the influences of both by examining at demographic and socio-economic correlates of sex role attitudes among Black women and men. It is possible that the large amount of support for egalitarianism among Blacks is a consequence of Blacks' unique experience in this country, whereas differences found among sub-groups speak of influences from the broader society.

Notes

[1]Households were selected in 76 primary areas (large SMSAs, other cities and counties). Forty-four areas were in the South, 14 in the North Central reigon, 10 in the Northeast and 8 in the West.
[2]Eligibility was determined by having at least one living parent and that parent's parent, or a living parent and a child at least 14 years of age, or a child who has a child 14 years old and older and a grandchild 14 years old or older.
[3]In addition, two of their family members, a parent and a child, a grandparent and a parent or a child and a grandchild were also interviewed.

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